



Bay County families welcome adopted additions

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By Patti Brandt
times writer

Before the official start of her brand new sister's adoption ceremony, Katie Hoffman was busy passing around a box of tissues.

She's only 13, but she knows from experience that the ceremony tends to make people cry.

Katie was adopted one year ago by the Hoffman family. And she was in Bay County Probate Court once again on Tuesday - this time to help usher Anna, also 13, into the family.

Their adoption confirmation ceremony was one of three performed Tuesday in the courtroom of Probate Judge Karen Tighe.

It was a way to give the children permanent homes, but it was also a way to mark Michigan's first Adoption Day, in which 269 children were formally adopted statewide. The day coincides with the fourth annual National Adoption Day, which was Saturday.

"This is one of the happiest moments that happens in a courtroom," Tighe said. "I'm very happy to say we're providing permanency for some wonderful children."

Children like 23-month-old Jenna, being adopted by Rod and Janine Foor. Jenna is the couple's third child, but they also have three foster children living with them that they plan to adopt very soon.

"We feel that from the day she walked into our lives that she was ours," Rod Foor said between sobs. "And I thank God for her."

For cousin Devyn Foor, 4, it was a little simpler.

"I'm Foor and she's Foor," Devyn said. Or did she mean four?

There is also Hanna, nearly 2.

Her new parents, Theresa and Steven Liebrock, who've had her since she was a newborn, have different reasons for adoption.

The couple could not have children, tried foster parenting and loved it. Hanna has a 4-year-old brother who is also adopted.

"It's a handful, but exciting," Theresa Liebrock, who is an adopted child herself, says of the two children. "I'm thrilled that I got a boy and a girl."

Hanna was a bit fidgety Tuesday.

"Let me state for the record that Hanna's all dressed up in pink and she's very cute, but she's a little restless," Tighe said with a smile. "She's not used to sitting still like this."

Children become wards of the state when their parents - for whatever reason - release all rights to them, or when a judge has terminated their rights due to abuse or neglect.

Right now there are 28 children in Bay County who are wards of the state. And though they have not yet been formally adopted, they do have families that plan to adopt them.

But qualified parents who are willing to adopt children, especially older children, are always needed, said Jan Soper, an adoption specialist with the Bay County Family Independence Agency.

David and Linda Hoffman, new parents of Anna Hoffman, have three adult sons.

"We kind of went through the empty-nest syndrome and said, 'The house is too quiet,'" David Hoffman said. "So we got into foster care and got two beautiful girls."

For the Hoffmans, adopting the two girls, who are just one month apart in age, was the culmination of years of having them as foster children.

The process of finding a home for a child who has been taken from or given up by a parent sometimes took years before a group of state laws went into effect, Soper said.

Those new laws say that children have the right to a permanent home, and parents who've had children taken away now have one year to become better parents or risk losing their children permanently.

There are about 19,500 children in foster care in Michigan, and about 4,500 wards of the state who have the goal of being adopted.

Most wards have an adoptive home identified, but about 400 children need homes.

In Bay City, the courtroom was full of brand new aunts, uncles, cousins, grandmas, grandpas and great-grandmas and grandpas who all were happy with the new additions to their families.

"All children bring their special little personalities and joys," said Florence Wagoner, grandmother to Hanna. "It's a joy to know that we are finalizing it today and she'll be ours."

Lahoma Buckley is Jenna's grandmother.

"I am very glad to be here and I will be the very best grandma that I can be for you, Jenna," Buckley said.

Anthony Hoffman, Anna Hoffman's new brother, attended the ceremony with his own two daughters.

"She makes us whole," Anthony Hoffman says of Anna. "She makes us complete as a family. We've come full circle."

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